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University of North Carolina at Asheville

“Riot and bloodshed on the street”:  
The Asheville Election Riot and Reconstruction Era Politics in Western North Carolina

A Senior Thesis Submitted to  
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## **Abstract**

The Asheville Election Riot demonstrates many of the social and political issues seen throughout Reconstruction in Western North Carolina. It serves as a starting point for the improper punishment of those involved with racially motivated violence, leading to the empowerment of the Ku Klux Klan and radical Conservatism. When paired with the premature withdrawal of federal support and an underdeveloped Republican Party, conservative politics, racial violence and the Klan began to flourish within the region.

Racially motivated violence, voting rights, and the role of the federal government were crucial issues throughout Reconstruction in the South. One of the key events that illuminated these issues was the unrest and political turmoil exposed by the Asheville Election Riot of 1868. Following the success of the Republican Party in the North Carolina elections of 1868, major federal support in the form of troops, federal agencies, and funds were withdrawn from the state. This retraction was due to the federal government viewing political advances as a sign that North Carolina was making progress towards racial and social equality, and away from the secessionist policies that led to the Civil War. The federal government removed troops and infrastructure from the region in hopes that the structures it had set up would continue to protect the rights and values of local citizens. Despite events like the Asheville Election Riot that signaled the tense social environment of Western North Carolina, the federal government used political sentiments and election results as a sign of progress within the state.

Any progress that the state had made was temporary, as the suppression of regressive Conservative forces was due only to the presence of direct federal authority. Republican victories in elections were short lived, with the quick replacement of these newly elected representatives by Democrats in the next election cycle in 1870. Alongside a shift on the party line, the 1868 election marked the end of the Freedmen's Bureau within North Carolina. The installation of the Freedmen's Bureau in southern states following the Civil War aimed to help with the rough transition period following the conclusion of the war. The office mainly provided economic support, aimed primarily at the African American and poor white populations, as well as providing legal support and educational opportunities. With this office no longer available to serve as protection for African Americans, Republicans, and federal representatives, there was an

uptick in violence. Removing the Freedmen's Bureau created a power vacuum which allowed for the entry of the Ku Klux Klan.

From there, Western North Carolina would fall into a chaotic and violent period during the early years of Reconstruction. Despite holding a majority of government offices within Western North Carolina, the Republican Party repeatedly made inept and apathetic choices when granted the option to punish and prosecute violent Conservatives and the Ku Klux Klan. This trend started with the Asheville Election Riot and the failure to adequately punish the Conservative shooters involved. The violence of the Asheville Election Riot exemplifies the tense social environment of Western North Carolina. Due to the inadequate prosecution of those involved, the Ku Klux Klan became emboldened. This paired with the withdrawal of the Freedmen's Bureau and federal troops led to an underdeveloped Republican Party with an inability to stem the rise of conservative politics, racial violence and the Ku Klux Klan.

## **Historiography**

The earliest secondary writing on the Asheville Election Riot was done by John Preston Arthur in 1914. He wrote a book covering history in Western North Carolina from 1730-1913.<sup>1</sup> One of the sad facets of this book is that, while containing many interesting and important stories from the history of Western North Carolina, none have proper citations, no sources are listed, and a portion of the text was written based on oral accounts taken many years later. This weakens the scholarly legitimacy of this work, though it does remain a useful source. Through Arthur's older point of view, we get a unique perspective on many aspects of the riot. The

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<sup>1</sup>John Preston Arthur, *Western North Carolina: A History from 1730-1913* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1914).

change that is most starkly different from modern works is Arthur's opinion on Oscar Eastmond, a former Union soldier from New York and the head of the Buncombe County Freedmen's Bureau during the Asheville Election Riot. From Arthur's view, Eastmond put in little to no effort to help stop or calm the unrest. Steven Nash represents modern scholarship by stating that, while Eastmond did not make an enormous impact on the riot, this was due to the unavailability of military support from neighboring towns.<sup>2</sup> With this change in historiography, Eastmond transforms from an incompetent official to a man who had his opportunities cut short due to the exit of the federal military authorities from the area.

For a look into the turbulence of the Republican Party within Western North Carolina, one can look to Gordon McKinney's *Southern Mountain Republicans*.<sup>3</sup> Within this book, McKinney focuses on the Republican Party in the Southern Mountains from the Civil War onward. Due to the high concentration of Union sympathizers and Confederate deserters, post-Civil War Western North Carolina became a progressive counterpart to the slave reliant Piedmont and Coastal regions and is often portrayed as supportive of African American civil rights. These ideas would feed into the creation of a stereotype of the Southern Mountain Republican. McKinney attempts to strip away this façade by presenting evidence to the contrary. Throughout his book, he presents the truly conflicted nature of Western North Carolina Republicans, who resented the progress that African Americans were making, but were equally uncomfortable with the backing of the Confederacy seen in the Democratic Party. McKinney believes that one of the reasons that the Republican Party began to lose support was due to its

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<sup>2</sup>Steven Nash, "Aiding the Southern Mountain Republicans: The Freedmen's Bureau in Buncombe County," *North Carolina Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (January 2006): 26-29, accessed September 3, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23522931>.

<sup>3</sup>Gordon McKinney, *Southern Mountain Republicans: 1865-1900*, rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011).

support for progressive civil rights.<sup>4</sup> This alienated many white mountaineers and caused a large return to the Democratic Party. Attempting to categorize the population into a single political caricature cuts out an overwhelming majority of those who were more conservative leaning, therefore creating an inequality in historical representation. Despite his focus on mountain Republicanism and civil rights, McKinney fails to mention the Asheville Election Riot throughout this book.

The Asheville Election Riot of 1868 has been somewhat overlooked by scholars, remaining an unfamiliar event even within local history circles. Eric Olson was the first modern scholar to write about the event, meaning that most, if not all, subsequent literature on the riot relies on his work. Olson's paper provides a sizable portion of the basic information known about the riot. Within it, he attempts to put the election riot within an atmosphere of racial tension in Western North Carolina. Olson considers three different events in Reconstruction era Asheville that represent this sense of tension and violence. The first is the election riot, and then he goes on to discuss lynching and the racist portrayal of African Americans within Asheville newspapers.<sup>5</sup>

In a paper presented at the Annual Conference of Appalachian Studies Association in 2015, Steven Nash attempted to update and further many of the ideas seen within Olson's paper.<sup>6</sup> Building on many of the ideas seen in Olson's paper, Nash works to put the riot in a larger context with more background information. For Nash, the Election Riot was the first in a large

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<sup>4</sup>McKinney, *SMR*, 50.

<sup>5</sup>Eric Olson, "Race Relations in Asheville, North Carolina: Three Incidents, 1868-1906," in *Appalachian Experience: Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Appalachian Studies Conference*, ed. Barry M. Buxton, Malinda L. Crutchfield, William E. Lightfoot, and Jacqueline P. Stewart (Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1983), 153-165.

<sup>6</sup>Steven Nash, "A Turning Point in the Appalachian Reconstruction: A New Look at the Asheville Election Day Riot of 1868," paper presented at Annual Conference of Appalachian Studies Association, Huntington, WV, March 27-29, 2015. Paper in author's possession.

wave of violent acts that hit Western North Carolina. After this event, the residents of the mountain region would shift to more conservative ideologies and groups, truly making it a “turning point.”

Within Western North Carolina the standard belief is that the Ku Klux Klan was not a significant force. Arthur’s *Western North Carolina* only mentions the Klan once, in reference to the Kirk-Holden War of 1870.<sup>7</sup> This blends into the general idea that the Klan was only significant within the Piedmont and Coastal regions of North Carolina. Racial tensions were much higher due to these regions’ reliance on the plantation system, as well as having larger African American populations, both of which resulted in a stronger call for the Klan’s existence. The idea that the Klan was not in Western North Carolina links into the stereotype of the Mountain Republican, as the inhabitants of the region would be too liberal for the Klan to ever make any headway. More recent historiography has attempted to disprove this idea, bringing up events of racial or political violence in which the Klan showed their power over the region.

Bruce Stewart has recently argued for a different interpretation of the Klan’s existence in the area. While still focusing heavily on the concept of race, a large quantity of Klan violence within Western North Carolina was directed towards federal revenue agents. This links directly into the moonshining commonly seen within this region, since these federal revenue agents would attempt to stop illegal production of alcohol and those bypassing federal tax laws.<sup>8</sup> The framework set up by the federal government in the early period of Reconstruction allowed for these agents to search for moonshiners on a larger scale, which would soon prompt a violent reaction from the Klan. The key issue within all facets of the Klan, whether focusing on race

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<sup>7</sup>Arthur, 641.

<sup>8</sup>Bruce Stewart, “‘When Darkness Reigns Then is the Hour to Strike’: Moonshining, Federal Liquor Taxation, and Klan Violence in Western North Carolina, 1868-1872,” *North Carolina Historical Review* 80, no. 4 (October 2003): 453-474, accessed October 12, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23522839>.

issues or liquor laws, was the expansion of federal power. Many felt that they had lost their independence in the post-Civil War era. Therefore, in response to claims that the federal government was curtailing the rights and independence of many white Southerners, the Klan formed as a fearful reaction to maintain the status quo. Regardless of the Klan's intentions, more recent scholarship clearly shows the existence and prevalence of the organization within Western North Carolina, while still maintaining that chapters there never grew to the size seen in the other regions of the state.

The most recent scholarly work on Western North Carolina during Reconstruction is Steven Nash's *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge*.<sup>9</sup> Within this work, Nash looks into the intricacies of post-Civil War political life in the mountain region. A key focus of this book is to combat the common historiographical trend to treat the Appalachian Mountains as extraordinary. Although the plantation system was not as ingrained in the economic sphere, social and political unrest seen throughout the South easily relates back to Western North Carolina. Throughout the book, Nash attempts to normalize the Appalachian Mountains, giving a different historiographical view on the region when compared to other authors who have covered it in the past.

This paper will bring an updated and in-depth view onto the Asheville Election Riot. By using the riot to view many of the key components and issues of post-Civil War politics, we can see flaws in the handling of Reconstruction. Due to these flaws, the race-based violence seen prior to and during the Civil War continued with increasing brutality for many years to come, and the Republican Party would fail to see further success or stop the violence. Their Democratic counterparts soon took their places, causing Western North Carolina to move closer to conservative policies and further from the progressive idealism of Reconstruction. The

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<sup>9</sup>Steven Nash, *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).



Republican Party was unable to fend off this conservative tide due to their underdeveloped infrastructure. One result was a severe mishandling of punishment towards those involved in racial violence and voter discrimination.

### **Western North Carolina in the Civil War and Reconstruction**

Western North Carolina played an interesting role in the Civil War, serving less as a major battleground and more as an escape from the Confederacy. One of the key pieces of the Civil War experience for this section of the state was the extreme influx of Confederate deserters who made their way to the mountains. Due to the rougher terrain, as well as the lack of influence from federal powers, it served as a haven for those who were unhappy with the Confederacy. In fact, because of the high concentration of anti-Confederates and discriminatory conscription laws, paramilitary groups began to form to counter Confederate advances. This led to guerilla warfare that slowly dismantled the region's economic and political substructure. Democratic candidates bore a large portion of the blame for this destruction due to their close affiliation with the Confederacy. After the close of the war, this allowed the Republican Party to make advances politically within Western North Carolina.<sup>10</sup>

While William Woods Holden became North Carolina's governor immediately following the war, Jonathan Worth, a Democratic candidate, won the first gubernatorial election. This is due to the fact that there was not an institutionally supported candidate to oppose him. However, this changed with the formation of the Republican Party in North Carolina on March 27, 1867.<sup>11</sup> Once officially formed, the Republican Party grew quickly within the Mountain region. This

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<sup>10</sup>McKinney, *SMR*, 24-29.

<sup>11</sup>Jonathan Worth, "To Andrew Johnson, March 29, 1867," *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth, Vol. II* (Raleigh, NC: Edwards and Broughton Printing Co., 1909), 925-927.

section of the state remained an anomaly when compared to the Piedmont and Coastal areas, as it was the only one where a majority of Republicans were white voters.<sup>12</sup> Worth was supportive of the policies and practices of Andrew Johnson, stating that the president's term would be seen as "one of the most enviable which our history will record."<sup>13</sup> Both men closely allied with more conservative politics, which tended to lean towards trends seen within pre-Civil War era North Carolina policies. This led many to view their terms as a continuation of Civil War politics as opposed to the progress promised by Reconstruction.

North Carolina made major progress with the passage of the Constitution of 1868. This was one of the key changes needed for re-admittance to the Union, with a majority of the committee being Republican, and therefore allowing for the adoption of more pro-civil rights policies.<sup>14</sup> One of these policies was an ordinance created to stop voter intimidation. This ordinance made denying a person's right to vote a misdemeanor. This specifically focuses on those who would attempt to intimidate, bribe, or become violent with potential voters. Moreover, it disallowed employment discrimination based on political alignment.<sup>15</sup> Though rarely used, the simple inclusion of this ordinance represented progress towards equality and civil rights. However, many within the constitutional committee were not pleased with these new developments. Plato Durham, the leader of the minority conservative section, expressed his displeasure with the imposition of federal policies by stating that, "If, then, negro suffrage and negro equality are forced upon us, we will not have consented to our own humiliation, and will at least, have preserved our honor and self-respect."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>McKinney, *SMR*, 45-46.

<sup>13</sup>Worth, 926.

<sup>14</sup>Nash, *Ragged Edge*, 106-107.

<sup>15</sup>"An Ordinance to Prevent the Intimidation of Voters," *Journal of the Constitutional Convention of the State of North-Carolina, at Its Session 1868* (Raleigh, NC: Joseph W. Holden Convention Printer, 1868), 452, accessed March 2, 2018, <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/conv1868/conv1868.html>.

<sup>16</sup>"Minority Report of the Committee on Suffrage," *Journal of the Constitutional Convention*, 238.

With the election of Holden, many saw continued movement towards positive progress. While Worth had appointed members of the “old guard,” Holden and his Republican constituents were the new representatives of the people. These fresh representatives were a change of the political guard.<sup>17</sup> With the election of Holden and the creation of the new state constitution in 1868, North Carolina was making progress towards racial equality and Union supported politics. However, all the while during Worth’s term and the early days of Holden’s era, federal representatives overlooked critical social and political challenges to Reconstruction, especially with regards to racial violence. Paul Escott, author of *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900*, stated that, “Worth asserted tirelessly that North Carolina was completely peaceable and loyal and ignored all evidence to the contrary.”<sup>18</sup> This was a common view among many politicians and decision makers, but with the progress of the Republican Party, a fearful backlash of racial violence was growing. Despite these ever-present violent events, the federal government began to withdraw, and with increasing speed after large Republican victories in the November Election of 1868.

## **The Riot**

The Asheville Election Riot took place on November 3, 1868, exhibiting the political unrest seen throughout the state prior to the withdrawal of federal support, and with increasing frequency after the fact. There are two major viewpoints represented through Republican and Democratic newspapers from the era, each with their own biases that have caused some disagreement about the actual events of the riot. However, by using information from both types

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<sup>17</sup>Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 88.

<sup>18</sup>Escott, 90.

of sources, alongside court testimony, it is possible to piece together a storyline. There is a general agreement on the first steps towards unrest: On November 3, 1868, an African American man, later identified as James Smith, was denied the right to vote. Around 2:00 in the afternoon, Smith went to cast his ballot. When he arrived at the polls, the clerk stated that he recognized Smith as a former criminal, publicly whipped for his crime. This caused the clerk to suspend his right to vote. Smith attempted to argue, leading to a fight almost breaking out between the two men. From there, Smith left the polls and a group of black voters began to congregate just outside of the courthouse. There was a general sense of distaste and anger within the crowd, which became violent when a black man named Silas announced his vote for the Democratic Party.<sup>19</sup>

While not mentioned in all sources, Silas played a pivotal role in further raising tensions within the crowd that had gathered outside of the courthouse. James Smith, alongside many other African Americans, had their right to vote revoked for no reason. Therefore, Silas announcing that he had voted, more than likely due to his support of the Democratic Party, pushed the crowd over the edge. In later court testimony Nicholas Woodfin stated that Silas “had made it worse by being a little insolent, hallooing for Seymour and Blair [the Democratic candidates].”<sup>20</sup> There is little evidence pointing to Silas’ intentions in provoking the crowd. His true motives never became clear, with a possible bribery from the Democrats or being an unprompted agitator remaining equally plausible. The already angry crowd began to pursue Silas, surrounding him and threatening to harm him. Multiple men came to Silas’ aid, including Milton Ledford, Gaston

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<sup>19</sup>“A Fatal Riot on Tuesday,” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte, NC), November 10, 1868, accessed September 14, 2017, Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>20</sup>*Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States. North Carolina* (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872), 239-240.

McDowell, William Blair, and members of the Merrimon and Patton families.<sup>21</sup> With their firearms prepared, these prominent white community figures went to protect Silas from the oncoming crowd.

According to the Coroner's Report released on November 9, James Smith, the man whose voting rights had been denied, threw a rock towards Silas. This rock hit either Silas, or one of his white protectors, knocking them to the ground.<sup>22</sup> In retaliation, the white group shot into the crowd of black rioters. While estimates of the injuries in the black crowd range from two to eighteen, there is a general agreement that there were no major white injuries.<sup>23</sup> Most tragic of all, in the volley of shots going into the crowd, James Smith sustained fatal injuries. Bullets hit him in the head and neck, causing him to die later that night. While there were multiple people who shot around the same time, Milton Ledford went on trial as the primary shooter in the murder of Smith.<sup>24</sup> Due to the gunshots, the crowd quickly dispersed as the rioters fled the scene.

While this remains the most central explanation of the riot, newspapers from the time had drastically different accounts of the event. Republican papers viewed James Smith more sympathetically, with blame put on the clerk that originally denied his right to vote. The *Rutherford Star* exemplified this viewpoint by stating that the clerk, "certainly had no right to challenge a voter, [which] was the beginning of what ended in the loss of life."<sup>25</sup>

Hotly debated in the time was the innocence of the rioting group. After the denial of James Smith's voting rights, the *Western Democrat* reported that there were groups of twenty to

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<sup>21</sup>*State vs. Jesse Crook, et al.*, Buncombe Superior Court Minutes, Minutes Docket to Fall Term 1868, Book A, 432, C.013.30011.

<sup>22</sup>"Asheville Riot," *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Sentinel* (Raleigh, NC), November 18, 1868, accessed September 15, 2017, Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>23</sup>"Riot in Asheville," *Rutherford Star* (Rutherfordton, NC), November 14, 1868, accessed September 16, 2017, Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection. Notes a singular white injury, but no other papers report this statistic.

<sup>24</sup>"Asheville Riot," *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Sentinel*.

<sup>25</sup>"Riot in Asheville," *Rutherford Star*.

forty black men patrolling the streets with weapons. The *Democrat* stated that they walked the main street, “with sleeves rolled up, cudgel in hand, and in a bullying swaggering manner.”<sup>26</sup> This statement failed to be corroborated by any other reliable source. While most Republican sources claim that the crowd was unarmed, Democratic newspapers place weapons into the hands of the rioters. Outside of the stone thrown by James Smith, the Coroner’s Report states that a jury found there to be two men with guns within the black group.<sup>27</sup>

Another perspective of the riot comes from Harriet Jones, daughter of the Republican congressional candidate for Asheville, Alexander H. Jones. Harriet tells a slightly different story than the one taken from newspapers, placing it not as an event of its own, but rather in a larger context of violence building around the election. In a letter to her cousin, she describes the harassment of her father in the days prior to the riot. She reports that the Ku Klux Klan stoned their house repeatedly and attacked her father as he came back from his office at night. Most concerning of all is that James Smith, the singular death of the riot, was living in the Jones house during the November Election. Due to the violence directed towards Alexander Jones, he agreed to leave Asheville and stay in Washington DC until the tension had calmed slightly.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Significance of the Riot**

Some historians believe that the riot had a more political meaning behind it. There seem to be ulterior motives that hint that the riot was less of an outburst of underlying racial issues and more of a politically pointed attempt to undermine Alexander Jones’ campaign and the

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<sup>26</sup>“A Fatal Riot on Tuesday,” *Western Democrat*.

<sup>27</sup>“Asheville Riot,” *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Sentinel*.

<sup>28</sup>Harriet Jones to William C. Stevens, December 7, 1868, Williams Collins Stevens Correspondence, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan, 7-10, accessed January 15, 2018, <http://name.umdl.umich.edu/2011431.0016.001>.

Freedmen's Bureau.<sup>29</sup> Further supporting this theory is a letter sent to Governor Holden, stating that "The Democratic party is responsible for the riot."<sup>30</sup> Jones blamed the riot for a loss of votes, claiming that there had been tampering at the polls, causing him to lose the election.<sup>31</sup> These claims would lead to a Congressional investigation into the results, which later declared Alexander H. Jones the victor.<sup>32</sup>

The *Daily Journal* claimed that the African American crowd that attempted to accost Silas grew to two hundred or more men, while the white shooters numbered only eight.<sup>33</sup> Multiple other Democratic newspapers echoed similar sentiments, using the numbers to craft a narrative of white superiority and the fear of a black threat. Newspapers reported that multiple race riots had taken place across the South, all ending in a comparable manner. While the African American crowds were to number in the hundreds, white defenders were in much smaller numbers.<sup>34</sup> By reporting this, these authors perpetuated ideas similar to the Lost Cause Narrative of the Confederacy, while also furthering beliefs of black inferiority.

The Asheville Election Riot serves an even larger role within white superiority propaganda as these white community figures became protectors of the life and rights of a black man. This is the story displayed within most Democratic newspapers from this period, placing a heavy emphasis on paternalism and White Supremacy, while disregarding the rights and lives of the Republican voters. The narrative provided through these papers intended to combat the rising

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<sup>29</sup>Nash, *Ragged Edge*, 125-126.

<sup>30</sup>R. M. Henry to W. W. Holden, Nov 4 1868, *Papers of William Woods Holden, Volume 1: 1841-1868*, ed. Horace W. Raper (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 2000), 399-400.

<sup>31</sup>*Western Vindicator* (Rutherfordton, NC), November 23, 1868, accessed September 14, 2017, Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>32</sup>Nash, *Ragged Edge*, 126.

<sup>33</sup>"State News," *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC), November 11, 1868, accessed September 14, 2017, Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>34</sup>"The Late Riots in the South," *Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC), November 11, 1868, accessed September 14, 2017, Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.

tide of African American independence seen in post-Civil War America. Now able to vote and experience a degree of freedom, African Americans were beginning to be a threat to White Supremacy.<sup>35</sup>

Another aspect of Democratic propaganda is the emphasis on undermining the Republican Party and federal government. As an extension of both groups, the Freedmen's Bureau was at risk for violent outbursts and attempts at slander. Multiple newspapers placed blame on the Bureau for their failure to stop the riot prior to the murder of James Smith. The *Western Democrat* stated that "if the proper authorities, or those who profess to be the only friends of the negroes, had advised them to go home after voting, the last and fatal difficulty would not have happened."<sup>36</sup> While this narrative ignores the fact that many within the crowd were unable to vote, it represents another example of paternalist ideology as well as placing the blame on the government entities and representatives supportive of the black cause. The Coroner's Report gives us another viewpoint into public opinion on these groups at the time, with the jury agreeing on the fact that "Civil Officers neglected to take proper precautions to guard against the occurrence of this riot."<sup>37</sup>

From these sources, it is easy to ascertain that the reaction, or lack of action, taken by civil authorities and the Freedmen's Bureau caused a substantial portion of the population to be heavily displeased. Due to this, the common historiographic narrative was that Oscar Eastmond, the head of the Buncombe County Freedmen's Bureau, made no attempt to stop the riot. John Preston Arthur goes so far as to state that Eastmond had called upon a group of black men to shout their support for the Republican candidates, further raising tensions.<sup>38</sup> However, there has

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<sup>35</sup>McKinney, *SMR*, 47.

<sup>36</sup>"A Fatal Riot on Tuesday," *Western Democrat*.

<sup>37</sup>"Asheville Riot," *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Sentinel*.

<sup>38</sup>Arthur, 299-300.



been a more recent movement that shows a less demonized perspective regarding the head of the Buncombe Bureau.

Eastmond had attempted to calm the unrest by calling in military support from Morganton. In a telegraph and letter sent to the Raleigh office of the Bureau, as well as directly to Morganton, Eastmond pleaded for help: “Riot and bloodshed on the streets, one man killed several wounded, send troops immediately.”<sup>39</sup> The day after the riot coincided with the beginning of the withdrawal of federal troops. By the time the offices received the message, all the troops had already left. Jacob Chur, Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen’s Bureau, would respond stating that Eastmond could only look for armed assistance through “the civil authorities.”<sup>40</sup> However, no official police force had been set up. While a bill had been submitted a year prior to the election riot that outlined the formation of a police force in Asheville, Republicans and officials feared that it would be used to create a Conservative force that would harass local African Americans and Republicans. When federal government officials placed Oscar Eastmond to head the creation of the police force, Conservatives quickly shelved the bill, never revisiting it.<sup>41</sup> There is a sad irony behind this situation, as fear of a conservative and racially motivated organization would eventually lead to difficulty in stopping the rise of Conservatives and the Ku Klux Klan.

While the North Carolina Election of 1868 was a net win for the Republican Party due to the large victories seen statewide, it coincides with the first major missteps in a series of mistakes seen after they achieved political success. The handling of the prosecution and

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<sup>39</sup>Oscar Eastmond, telegram, November 3, 1868, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, NARA Microfilm M843, roll 2.

<sup>40</sup>Jacob Chur to Oscar Eastmond, November 7, 1868, North Carolina Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records, NARA Microfilm M843, roll 2.

<sup>41</sup>Nash, *Ragged Edge*, 110-111.

punishment of the shooters was done sloppily. Milton Ledford, the man accused of firing the fatal bullet, went to trial for murder separately from the rest of his compatriots. Early in the proceedings, the State Solicitor ordered that the case move to neighboring Henderson County.<sup>42</sup> There the judge quickly found him to be not guilty, citing weak evidence as the reason for no longer pursuing the case.<sup>43</sup> Fifteen other men went to trial for inciting the riot, all of whom were white. Although the court had a stronger argument against them when compared to the Ledford case, all got off only having to pay a fine.<sup>44</sup> Nicholas Woodfin, who represented both Ledford and the others, persuaded Judge Henry, a Republican, to “let bygones be forgotten.”<sup>45</sup> This means that the judge, as opposed to pursuing and charging the men who had violently escalated the riot, thought it best for this event to be pushed away in the public memory. While the perusal of further charges could have been pursued further, holding conservative forces accountable, the path of least resistance was chosen to lessen possible unrest. This was a misstep that constantly followed the Republican Party through early Reconstruction. The Democratic Party and the Ku Klux Klan repeatedly abused this by committing atrocious acts while receiving no punishment.

Following the advances made by the Republican Party in the April and November Elections of 1868, the federal government decided to remove armed forces and the Freedmen’s Bureau. After the gubernatorial election of April where William Woods Holden, the Republican candidate, won the seat, the Freedmen’s Bureau was already beginning to prepare to close their offices. Jacob Chur, who worked in the central Raleigh office of the Freedmen’s Bureau, began to send out letters to the offices ordering them to let people go, or for other offices to begin the

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<sup>42</sup>*State vs. Milton Ledford*, Buncombe Superior Court Minutes, Minutes Docket to Fall Term 1868, 417, C.013.30011.

<sup>43</sup>*State vs. Milton Ledford*, Henderson County Superior Court Minutes, Minute Docket of Spring Term 1869, 168, C.050.30005.

<sup>44</sup>Buncombe Superior Court Minutes, Minute Docket of Spring Term 1869, 478-480, C.013.30011.

<sup>45</sup>*Report of the Joint Select Committee*, 240.

closing process. Oscar Eastmond received one of these letters, which requested that he fire one of the Bureau clerks to lower expenses.<sup>46</sup> After this point, the reach of the Freedmen Bureau shrank, minimizing its role until the Buncombe office finally closed on January 1, 1869.<sup>47</sup> Despite multiple pleas for the Bureau to remain in place, almost all operations except for some educational support ended due to a lack of Congressional support for its continuation.<sup>48</sup>

The Bureau office represented the last form of federal protection for Western North Carolina. While substantially weakened after the withdrawal of troops in November, their presence alone created a link between marginalized people and the government, giving them a path through which they could file their complaints in hope of retribution. With this final layer of protection removed, the citizens of the mountains had to rely on themselves for protection in the face of an oncoming storm of violence in the form of an ever-growing Klan.

## **The Klan**

The Ku Klux Klan, while infamous today, had relatively simple beginnings. They originally formed as a group of former Confederate soldiers in Pulaski, Tennessee. In May 1866, they met together and created what amounted to a social and music club. Many of the members were known for their involvement in the minstrel tradition, playing music and comedy shows. Soon, the club began to take on a more serious tone, as these former Confederates began to tire of their current situation. The Civil War dismantled Pulaski's economy, leaving very few job opportunities in the post-war era. Two founding members of the Klan lost their law office in a

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<sup>46</sup>Jacob Chur to Oscar Eastmond, August 31, 1868, North Carolina Freedmen's Bureau Field Office Records, NARA Microfilm, M843, roll 2.

<sup>47</sup>"Judge Pool's Charge to the Grand Jury," *North Carolinian* (Elizabeth City, NC), December 23, 1869, accessed February 15, 2018, Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>48</sup>"Order Disbanding the Freedmen's Bureau," *Wilmington Journal*, December 4, 1868, accessed January 12, 2018, Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.

fire that ripped through downtown Pulaski.<sup>49</sup> Due to these poor economic conditions and the lack of jobs, many within the Ku Klux Klan shifted focus towards more serious issues. A common theme within these initial stages was the urge to rebuild and reinvigorate southern culture. From there, it is easy to see how the group began to target former Union men, African Americans, and Republicans— all groups who had opposed the Confederacy.<sup>50</sup> As Allen Trelease, author of *White Terror* stated, the Klan would become, “a terrorist arm of the Democratic Party, whether the party leaders as a whole liked it or not.”<sup>51</sup>

By August 1867, the Tennessee Freedmen’s Bureau was suspicious of the violent tendencies of the Ku Klux Klan towards former Union sympathizers.<sup>52</sup> These violent acts caused a media uproar, leading to increased press on the national level. Thanks to the spread of these news stories, the Klan was able to quickly grow throughout the South. By September of 1868, the Pulaski Klan had grown to such high prominence that Tennessee’s Governor Brownlow specifically targeted them, declaring war upon the group to avoid “any pretext for a war of the races...”<sup>53</sup>

The Ku Klux Klan first emerged in North Carolina in April of 1868. Reports of violence began after William Holden won the 1868 gubernatorial election. Oscar Eastmond first reported trouble with the Klan on April 15, when threatening posters appeared in Western North Carolina. These posters stated, “Ku Klux Klan, the hour approacheth... When darkness reigns then is the

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<sup>49</sup>“Fire at Pulaski,” *Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, TN), May 17, 1867, accessed February 12, 2018.

<sup>50</sup>Elaine Frantz Parsons, *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan During Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015), 27-72.

<sup>51</sup>Allen Trelease, *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), xlvii.

<sup>52</sup>“Knights of the Golden Circle or Something Else,” *Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, TN), August 23, 1867, accessed February 12, 2018.

<sup>53</sup>“War Upon the KuKlux,” *Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, TN), September 18, 1868, accessed February 12, 2018.

hour to strike.”<sup>54</sup> Alongside this, Eastmond reported that the Freedmen’s Bureau sign had been torn off the door.<sup>55</sup> Fear of the Klan was spreading throughout the region, with multiple groups targeted. While the Klan is known mainly for racial violence, within Western North Carolina the organization had broader targets. Republican figures and federal tax collectors bore the brunt of the Klan’s violence. The levying of federal liquor taxes and the crack down on moonshining drew a sizable portion of Klan attention.<sup>56</sup> This led to an established standard that the Klan was not only a reaction of fear towards black progress, but also one of anger towards farther-reaching policies of the government.

Klan violence appeared in Western North Carolina from this point onward, with reports of violence statewide within a month of Eastmond’s first encounter with them. Voter bribing and intimidation were early tactics of the North Carolina Klan, with black Republican voters being harassed in the streets and others being paid to stay away from the polls entirely.<sup>57</sup> While most Klan activity had quickly peaked and dwindled after it suddenly burst onto the national conscience in 1868, in Western North Carolina it remained unchecked.<sup>58</sup> Compared to the rest of the state, the mountain region did not build as strong of an organized Klan mainly due to the lower number of African Americans within the population. This meant that the level of racial violence never rose to the same extremes as the Piedmont and Coastal regions. Nevertheless, the Klan made major headway into the area and became a major and influential political player. As they gained power, more representatives within the community came to their aide to protect their reputation and growth. Therefore, they more easily skirted consequences. When given the

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<sup>54</sup>Stewart, 453.

<sup>55</sup>Oscar Eastmond to George H. Williams, April 17, 1868, Freedmen’s Bureau Field Office Records NARA Microfilm M1909, roll 4.

<sup>56</sup>Stewart, 454.

<sup>57</sup>“The Rebel Spirit,” *Weekly Pioneer* (Asheville, NC), May 14, 1868, accessed January 6, 2018, Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.

<sup>58</sup>Parsons, 305.

opportunity to punish the Klan, Republican lawmakers were unable to adequately impose repercussions, tending to go the path of least resistance to curb tension.

The Lusk-Shotwell Controversy represents a show of the Klan's rising power within Western North Carolina.<sup>59</sup> Taking place in 1869, it shows the possible damage done to those who attempted to undermine the progress of the Ku Klux Klan. Virgil Lusk was a prominent Republican in Asheville, who repeatedly clashed with Randolph Shotwell. Shotwell ran one of the top Conservative papers in Buncombe County, the *Asheville Citizen*. Lusk was known for his prosecutions of Klan members as the Solicitor of the Twelfth Circuit of North Carolina, while Shotwell was well known for his activity within the Klan. These men represented the extremes of the political spectrum of Reconstruction America and therefore became clear combatants. Virgil Lusk reported the events of the controversy fifty-four years after they had transpired due to Shotwell publishing his account of the controversy in 1931. The only full version of Lusk's report comes through the *Appalachian Journal*, supplied and edited by Gordon McKinney. Lusk stated that the rivalry began in 1868-1869, when he prosecuted multiple Klan members. Shotwell swiftly responded with a strongly worded editorial in the next edition of the *Citizen*. Lusk replied through a different newspaper, which provoked a violent reaction from the Klan. Sadly, neither of these newspapers exist in any form today.<sup>60</sup> The day after the publication of Lusk's reply, Shotwell approached Lusk from behind and began to beat him with a cane. Lusk was knocked to the ground and in reaction, shot his attacker in the leg.<sup>61</sup> Shotwell would later state that when passing his adversary, he believed, "that no opportunity could equal the present for disgracing

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<sup>59</sup>Gordon McKinney, ed. "Introduction" in "The Klan in the Southern Mountains: The Lusk-Shotwell Controversy," *Appalachian Journal* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 89-104, accessed October 1, 2017, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40932374.94>.

<sup>60</sup>McKinney, ed. "Lusk-Shotwell Controversy," 102.

<sup>61</sup>Virgil Lusk, "Who Was to Blame," in "The Klan in the Southern Mountains: The Lusk-Shotwell Controversy," ed. Gordon McKinney, *Appalachian Journal* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1981), 94.

him by a public chastisement.”<sup>62</sup> However, Shotwell claims that he simply attempted to have a conversation over the newly published newspaper article, pulling a newspaper from his pocket when Lusk shot him out of fear.<sup>63</sup>

While the shooting had almost immediately ended the beating, there would be legal battles for years involving the two men. Following the shooting, both men were set to appear in court. Lusk was discharged and let free quickly, but Shotwell agreed to plead guilty for his crimes. Similar to the court proceedings after the Asheville Election Riot the year before, the opportunity to punish the conservatives accused of violence was not taken. Lusk persuaded the judge to drop the charges entirely, therefore allowing for Shotwell and his Ku Klux Klan compatriots to get off relatively scot free yet again.<sup>64</sup> While the Lusk-Shotwell Controversy was a small step towards political involvement for the Klan, the group repeatedly interfered with the political lives of the residents of Western North Carolina with ever growing ferocity due to the fact they were above the law.

Rutherford County offered a haven for the Republican Party throughout Reconstruction, with its county seat, Rutherfordton, being a stronghold for the party, and serving as a safe place for many who feared racial and political violence. This reputation brought an increased amount of resistance and violence into the county. David Schenck, a politician and lawyer, described Rutherfordton as a town destroyed by the sinful beliefs of the Republican Party, as representatives of the North manipulated and controlled it.<sup>65</sup> He stated that it fell victim to “the various fungus growths of putrid society.”<sup>66</sup> In reaction to this, the Rutherford Klan would form,

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<sup>62</sup>Randolph Shotwell, *Papers of Randolph Abbott Shotwell: Vol. II* (Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1931), 305.

<sup>63</sup>Shotwell, 306.

<sup>64</sup>Lusk, 95-96.

<sup>65</sup>Escott, 121.

<sup>66</sup>David Schenck, *Personal Writings, 1849-1901, Volume 6: 24 March 1868-22 October 1872*, David Schenck Papers, 1849-1917 Collection, Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library, Chapel Hill, NC, 32.

growing strong enough to raid Rutherfordton on June 6, 1871. The Klan beat many prominent Republican leaders and destroyed a local Republican newspaper office.<sup>67</sup>

While Rutherfordton's protective aura crumbled in this invasion, the Klan also faced repercussions, sustaining damage from the legal proceedings that followed. Many of those involved went to prison due to a crackdown on Klan activity by the federal government thanks to the Enforcement Act of 1871, otherwise known as the Ku Klux Klan Act. This allowed for the use of federal forces against the group and provided further protection to those prosecuting the Klan.<sup>68</sup>

One of the men arrested and imprisoned was Randolph Shotwell. Despite the continuation of violent behavior and Klan activity, Shotwell received help from an unlikely source. Virgil Lusk, when informed that his former rival had gone to prison, decided to stay steadfast in his prior belief that peace was preferable to punishment. Lusk attempted to get the man who had previously attacked him freed from prison. He went to the level of asking President Ulysses S. Grant directly for a pardon. While eventually successful in this attempt, Shotwell in no way appreciated his enemy turned ally, going on to repeatedly slander his name in his autobiography and newspaper editorials.<sup>69</sup> While the power of the Klan diminished following the Rutherford Invasion, it was not due to the power of the local Republican Party. Federal power was necessary to improve, yet again falling to the fact that the Republican Party was not structurally sound prior to the withdrawal of federal support.

Due to the increased support given by the Enforcement Acts, the Republican Party was able to finally stop a trend which began with the prosecution of those involved with the Asheville

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<sup>67</sup>Lusk, 97.

<sup>68</sup>Nash, *Ragged Edge*, 142-144.

<sup>69</sup>Lusk, 98-100.



Election Riot. This trend represented the lack of punishment for racial and political acts of aggression. The years of violence had changed the opinions seen in early Reconstruction, as outlined by an editorial in the *Weekly Pioneer*, “Feeble knees have been made strong, and weak back-bones have become iron. The fierce fires through which the Republicans have passed during the last few months have burnt out the generosity and magnanimity which characterized their action in the late Convention.”<sup>70</sup>

## Conclusion

The Asheville Election Riot highlights many of the issues that characterize Reconstruction. Racial violence, voters’ rights, and the role of the federal government all played primary roles within the riot and its aftermath. While the election embodies the victories and success that the Republican Party was able to achieve, the riot itself shows that this success was short lived and shallow. By using the Asheville Election Riot, the weaknesses of the Republican Party could have been noted, therefore showing that progress in North Carolina was not as far along as many believed. Federal support was still desperately needed, as is represented in the powerful backlash of the Democratic Party. Election victories were brief, as most newly elected Republicans would lose re-election. Alongside these Democratic political wins, the Ku Klux Klan rose to prominence. With no federal support left, the Republicans had no way of responding outside of legal pathways for years to come. However, as shown through the legal proceedings following the Election Riot, there was a disinclination to seek the kind of punishment that would repeatedly hinder justice. All this combined shows the lack of deep changes made, thoroughly disproving the fact that Western North Carolina was “reconstructed.”

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<sup>70</sup>“The Rebel Spirit,” *Weekly Pioneer*.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources:

**“A Fatal Riot on Tuesday.” *Western Democrat* (Charlotte, NC). November 10, 1868. Accessed September 14, 2017. Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.**

Within the North Carolina Newspaper Collection, this is the earliest available mention of the Asheville Election Riot. Alongside this, the articles surrounding it allow for us to see more examples of political and racial unrest throughout the South. Just above the Asheville Riot section, it comments on some fighting that took place at the polls in both Savannah and New Orleans. The newspaper is obviously more conservative leaning, and therefore some pieces of the facts or facets stretch to fit within a pro-White narrative. However, this newspaper allows us to see the earliest report of the Asheville Riot, therefore making it an important timestamp if nothing else.

**“Asheville Riot.” *Semi-Weekly Raleigh Sentinel* (Raleigh, NC). November 18, 1868. Accessed September 15, 2017. Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.**

Due to the unavailability of the *Asheville News*, the Coroner’s Report initially published within that paper is inaccessible. However, the *Raleigh Sentinel* copied and published this report for a wider audience to view. James Smith, the man who was initially denied the right to vote due to previous imprisonment, also the man to later be killed, is first mentioned by name in this paper. Milton Ledford, the man who accused of having shot the fatal blow, comes up for the first time alongside the other shooters, including Gaston McDowell who would later become the Sheriff of Asheville. Much of the blame is shifted onto Smith, who is said to have thrown a rock or some other object at the group of white men. A jury found him responsible for the outbreak of the riot due to this action. This source is an essential one for this topic due to the amount of information given through the Coroner’s Report.

**Buncombe Superior Court Minutes. Minute Docket of Spring Term 1869, 478-480. C.013.30011.**

The final verdicts of the Asheville Election Riot court cases are stated here, with all of those involved with the riot being let off with only a minor fine. This is another in a line of missteps taken by the Republican Party when attempting to punish racial violence. Scans provided through the North Carolina State Archives.

**“Fire at Pulaski.” *Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, TN). May 17, 1867. Accessed February 12, 2018.**

This newspaper article outlines a fire that destroyed a law firm owned by two original Klan members. This sources therefore exemplifies the economic issues that would cause the Klan to move towards territory that is more heinous. Accessed through Newspapers.com.

**“Judge Pool’s Charge to the Grand Jury.” *North Carolinian* (Elizabeth City, NC). December 23, 1869. Accessed February 15, 2018. Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.**

Gives further support for the closure of the Freedmen’s Bureau, and gives a specific date for its previous closure. Somewhat of a retrospective on the closure of the Bureau, and how it affected the state overall.

**Jones, Harriet. William Collin Stevens Correspondence, 1867-1869. Michigan in the Civil War Collection. Bentley Historical Library, Ann Arbor, MI. Accessed January 15, 2018. <http://name.umd.umich.edu/2011431.0016.001>.**

Harriet Jones was the daughter of Alexander Jones, one of the men running for a spot in the House of Representatives during the Election of 1868. She was one of the few people who supplied a recorded account of the riot that has survived until today. In one of the many useful letters within this collection, Harriet wrote to Stevens detailing the lead up to and the conflict surrounding the election. From this source, we gain a distinct perspective from the one reported within the many newspapers and the Klan Report. She states that the violence was entirely motivated by the fact that many African Americans were not allowed to vote. Harriet also places a lot more focus on James Smith, the man who died in the riot. According to her, Smith lived with the Jones family, making his murder personal, painful, and somewhat more insidious in her eyes. Since there are very few sources detailing the riot, Harriet’s account gives us an eyewitness record and a personal perspective that we cannot find anywhere else.

***Journal of the Constitutional Convention of the State of North-Carolina, at Its Session 1868.* Raleigh, NC: Joseph W. Holden Convention Printer, 1868. Accessed March 2, 2018. <http://docsouth.unc.edu/nc/conv1868/conv1868.html>.**

This online resource contains the entirety of the minutes for the Constitutional Convention of 1868 in North Carolina. It gives great detail about the Constitution, the laws passed, laws denied, and the views on the committee on the matters at hand.

**“Knights of the Golden Circle, or Something Else.” *Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, TN). August 23, 1867. Accessed February 12, 2018.**

The *Pulaski Citizen* worked as a propaganda tool for the Klan, as a founding member of the group owned it. This article shows that the Freedmen’s Bureau was aware of the Ku Klux Klan, and that they were attempting to curtail further growth. Accessed through Newspapers.com.

**“Late Riots in the South.” *Weekly Standard* (Raleigh, NC). November 11, 1868. Accessed September 14, 2017. Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.**

This paper serves as a stark contrast to the *Western Democrat*, as it shows a much more Republican point of view. The narrative is supportive of African Americans, stating that the Constitutional rights of black voters were being heavily violated when they were not allowed to vote. Republican narratives of the riot, as well as Republican newspapers have not survived as well as many Democratic sources, making this a valuable and beneficiary source for showing another side to the political spectrum.

**Lusk, Virgil S. “Who Was to Blame” in “The Klan in the Southern Mountains: The Lusk-Shotwell Controversy.” Edited by Gordon McKinney. *Appalachian Journal* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 89-104. Accessed October 1, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40932374>.**

Provided through a modern journal article and edited by Gordon McKinney, this source shows Virgil Lusk, a well-known Republican figure who prosecuted multiple Klansmen throughout his career, and his side of the events in his rivalry with Randolph Shotwell. One of the key events here is an assassination attempt by Shotwell and a few other Klansmen in 1869. Shotwell attacked Lusk from behind while he was in the streets of Asheville. Lusk retaliated by pulling out his gun, and shooting at his attackers, hitting and injuring Shotwell. This event further shows the volatile political environment of Western North Carolina during this period, while also presenting a case of Klan involvement in the politics of the region. This perspective will however be from a supporter and proponent of the Republican Party, meaning that some details slanted towards that perspective.

**“Order Disbanding the Freedmen’s Bureau.” *Wilmington Journal* (Wilmington, NC). December 4, 1868. Accessed January 12, 2018. Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.**

This newspaper source gives additional background on the decision to close the state Freedmen’s Bureau office, as well as giving it a more accurate timestamp. This alongside the telegrams of Jacob Chur calling for Bureau employees to be fired will allow us to see the circumstances surrounding the closure of these federal bureau offices.

**Raper, Horace W., ed. *Papers of William Woods Holden, Volume 1: 1841-1868*. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina Office of Archives and History, 2000.**

William Woods Holden was the Governor of North Carolina at the beginning of the Reconstruction period, and was later reelected, though his second term was cut short after being impeached and removed from office. His letters have an extremely wide scope, but many of the pieces of his correspondence are heavily important for this paper. The Asheville Election Riot is mentioned within a few letters, with some casually stating that it had occurred while reporting election results, while others go into more detail on the events that took place. One was even asking for the Governor to intervene in the legal events after the riot. However, the usefulness of these letters does not stop with the riot alone. Due to being a Republican, many reached out to him for help with civil rights and voter intimidation cases. Therefore, the reports of these events will give a further backbone to those seen within the Freedmen’s Bureau records and the Ku Klux Conspiracy report.

**“The Rebel Spirit.” *Weekly Pioneer* (Asheville, NC). May 14, 1868. Accessed January 6, 2018. Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.**

This editorial article contains a quote describing the reborn and toughened nature of the Republican Party following the repeated events of violence thrown onto them by the Klan. Despite this, expansion of the Klan would not stop until federal forces were sent to help.

**Records of the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, Record Group 105. Records of the Assistant Commissioner, Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, North Carolina, 1865-1870. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C. Accessed on September 1, 2017.**  
<https://www.familysearch.org/search/collection/2143119>.

This wide collection of records allows for the addition of the perspectives of the Freedmen's Bureau. Specifically, I will be using the correspondence of Jacob Chur and Oscar Eastmond within this paper, as they were the two major figures within Raleigh and Buncombe County respectively. By incorporating their correspondence, it aims to balance the historiographical view between government officials, newspapers, and the standard individual.

***Report of the Joint Select Committee to Inquire into the Condition of Affairs in the Late Insurrectionary States. North Carolina. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1872.***

This source, also known as the Ku Klux Conspiracy Report, shows court testimony of many different representatives and individuals from the Southern States. It looks deeply into the status of the Klan as well as if the rights of African Americans are being upheld. This source will allow multiple views of voter intimidation within the South. Some overt Klansmen testified within this report, showing their opinions on the state of race politics in North Carolina. The testimony of Nicholas Woodfin shows the Asheville Election Riot from the perspective of a white attorney from Buncombe County. Woodfin shares some of his knowledge around the court proceedings that followed the riot, as well as the jury's verdict in that case. Plato Durham, the Democratic House of Representatives candidate in the 1868 Election, testifies in a different section of the report eventually exposing himself as a Klansman. This causes the violence seen around the election of 1868 to take a slightly more politically motivated hue due to its close ties to both the Klan and the Democratic candidate.

**"Riot in Asheville." *Rutherford Star* (Rutherfordton, NC). November 14, 1868. Accessed September 16, 2017. Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.**

The *Rutherford Star* is a more Republican leaning paper, making it quite important for showing a balanced view of the Asheville Riot narrative. Alongside this, it is the first paper to mention a white man injury alongside the multiple black men that had been mentioned in all prior sources. Outside of this, it simply gives a slightly different wording to the *Weekly Standard*, which gives a more detailed account of the riot.

**Schenck, David. Personal Writings, 1849-1901, Volume 6: 24 March 1868-22 October 1872. David Schenck Papers, 1849-1917 Collection. Louis Round Wilson Special Collections Library. Chapel Hill, NC.**

David Schenck was a politician within North Carolina. He kept a diary that he regularly updated, allowing us to see into the world of a Democrat from this time period. Within my paper, I will be using his views on Rutherfordton, the county seat of Rutherford County, which he saw as a disgraceful and sinful area due to its strong Northern and Republican ties.

**Shotwell, Randolph Abbott. *Papers of Randolph Shotwell. Vol. II. Raleigh: North Carolina Historical Commission, 1931.***

Randolph Shotwell was the editor of the *Asheville Citizen* and a supporter of the Ku Klux Klan and Democratic Party. He was involved in a brawl and shooting with Virgil Lusk in the streets of Asheville. This was a politically motivated attack, and ended with Lusk shooting Shotwell. This source will serve as a contrasting piece to Lusk's perspective. It will also show a Conservative Democratic perspective on the political landscape of Asheville at the time.

**"State News." *Daily Journal* (Wilmington, NC). November 11, 1868. Accessed September 14, 2017. Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.**

Another newspaper source detailing the events of the riot. This one will be used to detail the number of white shooters seen in the riot, which is a figure argued by various different sources.

***State vs. Jesse Crook, et al. Buncombe Superior Court Minutes. Minutes Docket to Fall Term 1868. Book A, 432. C.013.30011.***

Court minutes here are used to get the full list and names of all those involved in the riot. All of those who came to the aid of Silas and shot into the crowd were included in this case. Scans provided through the North Carolina State Archives.

***State vs. Milton Ledford. Buncombe Superior Court Minutes. Minutes Docket to Fall Term 1868, 417. C.013.30011.***

Within this document, the court is ordering the case of Milton Ledford to be moved to nearby Henderson County, though the exact reasoning behind this is never expressly mentioned. Scans provided through the North Carolina State Archives

***State vs. Milton Ledford. Henderson County Superior Court Minutes. Minute Docket of Spring Term, 1869, 168. C.050.30005.***

Milton Ledford's case moved to the Henderson County Superior Court shortly after he appeared in the Buncombe Court. From this source, we gain the information that he was found to be not guilty, and that the case was not pursued further. Scans provided through the North Carolina State Archives.

**"War Upon the KuKlux." *Pulaski Citizen* (Pulaski, TN). September 18, 1868. Accessed February 12, 2018.**

In this *Citizen* article, the Governor of Tennessee is declaring war on the Ku Klux Klan. Due to an extreme uptick in violence, this was seen as the only logical way to combat the racial group. After this point, Klan activity within Tennessee began to fall. Accessed through Newspapers.com.

***Western Vindicator* (Rutherfordton, NC). November 23, 1868. Accessed September 14, 2017. Historic North Carolina Digital Newspaper Collection.**

A report from Raleigh supposedly shows that Plato Durham, the Conservative Democrat running for the House of Representatives in NC won the election. However, Alexander

Jones, Durham's opponent, reported that he lost many votes due to the riot in Asheville, and that he would seek legal action. This would lead to a Congress considering the case, voter fraud being found, and many going to the Freedmen's Bureau due to being intimidating out of voting. This article shows the confusion surrounding the election, as well as the riot's widespread impact, even outside of Buncombe County.

**Worth, Jonathan. "To Andrew Johnson, March 29, 1867." *Correspondence of Jonathan Worth, Vol. II*. Raleigh, NC: Edwards and Broughton Printing Co., 1909, 925-927.**

Jonathan Worth was the first elected governor of North Carolina in the post-Civil War era. He was a staunch Democrat, and a supporter of the policies of Andrew Johnson. This is best represented through this letter, which details Worth's view on Johnson's lasting legacy within the American historical world.

### **Secondary Sources:**

**Arthur, John Preston. *Western North Carolina: A History from 1730-1913*. Raleigh, NC: Edwards and Broughton Printing Company, 1914.**

Arthur's *Western North Carolina* was the first major look into the history of this region of the state. While it covers an extremely wide area of history, it loses a lot of credibility because it has no citations or sources. Nonetheless, it gives an interesting and more classical viewpoint on the riot and the events surrounding it.

**Escott, Paul D. *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988.**

Escott looks into the social system of North Carolina, attempting to understand what happened within the Reconstruction Era. This viewpoint focuses on elites vs ordinary whites, and the importance of this power relationship. Alongside the addition of this unique view, this book further adds background information to the paper, giving it more overall structure.

**Evans, William. *Ballots and Fence Rails: Reconstruction on the Lower Cape Fear*. 1974. Reprint, Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004.**

While I am aiming to focus my thesis specifically on Western North Carolina, another way I could examine the race politics and voting rights from Reconstruction could be through a comparative piece. Using this book, I could use Eastern North Carolina as a supportive piece to show the overarching racial policies and reactions throughout the state. Though not directly linked to voting rights, there was a riot in Wilmington on August 1, 1865 due to poor treatment and violence towards a former African American soldier. This was not a lone event on the coast, many other riots took place in 1865 alone. This paper could take the direction focused on showing the differences and similarities between the environments of Western and Eastern North Carolina both politically and socially. One of the largest differences would be the agricultural economy of Eastern North Carolina, which made slavery and labor issues more central to the economy. Due to the environment of Western North Carolina, these plantation systems were never widely used and therefore this common aspect of racial stratification is missing.

Therefore, this book is important due to the comparisons that could be made, showing that the Asheville Riot was not a standalone or extraordinary event.

**Foner, Eric. *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1988.**

This book serves to give basic background information for the Reconstruction period. Foner's work in this field is bar to none, and is generally agreed upon to be the most important and comprehensive within the field. Using this will allow me to gain a better understanding of Reconstruction era policies and trends.

**McKinney, Gordon B. "Layers of Loyalty: Confederate Nationalism and Amnesty Letters from Western North Carolina." *Civil War History* 51, no. 1 (March 2005): 5-22. Accessed January 30, 2018. <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/178612>.**

McKinney gives a detailed account of Civil War loyalties within Western North Carolina within this source. He takes directly from those who requested pardons from President Johnson following the war, and extrapolates numbers from there to represent Union and Confederate support.

**McKinney, Gordon B. *Southern Mountain Republicans: 1865-1900*. Rev. ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011.**

Throughout Reconstruction historiography, Appalachian whites are depicted as some of the most supportive people in regards to African American rights and Republican ideas. This creates the idea of the "Southern Mountain Republican." However, this completely cuts out a large portion of the population in the area who had more Democratic and Conservative ideologies, and fails to explain the poor performance of Republican candidates in the area in the later years of Reconstruction, which led to complete control of the area by Democrats. McKinney helps to fill this hole in the historiography by examining the Mountain Republican, looking into the role that the party played in the Mountain South. By filling this gap and adding texture to the political climate of the time, the racial violence and outbreaks such as the Asheville Election Riot become a lot more understandable.

**McKinney, Gordon., ed. "The Klan in the Southern Mountains: The Lusk-Shotwell Controversy." *Appalachian Journal* 8, no. 2 (Winter 1981): 89-104. Accessed October 1, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40932374>.**

McKinney provides us with Lusk's perspective on the Lusk-Shotwell Controversy through this piece. Lusk's account is not found in full in any other source, making this *Appalachian Journal* article especially valuable. McKinney gives important citation information, as well as giving a brief and informative introduction prior to Lusk's account.



**Nash, Steven E. "A Turning Point in the Appalachian Reconstruction: A New Look at the Asheville Election Day Riot of 1868." Paper, annual conference of the Appalachian Studies Association, Huntington, WV, March 27-29, 2015. Paper in author's possession.**

Within this conference paper, Nash attempts to update the views pushed forward by Eric Olson in his seminal paper on the riot and violence in Western North Carolina. While he does not entirely disavow Olson, Nash attempts to give the event an overall clearer backdrop, and focuses directly on the Election Day Riot. This means that within this source, there are many listed examples of racial violence, voter intimidation, and overall important references. Nash forwards an idea that this event was an important turning point in the progression of race politics in Western North Carolina. Due to this being the first major event in a rising tide of violence, it could be seen as a reaction of the political climate moving towards Conservatism. Sadly, due to this being a conference paper, there are no citations outside of what is in Nash's *Ragged Edge* book, which contains an excerpt from this essay. While this weakens the credibility and usefulness of the paper somewhat, due to the differing views pushed forward, as well as Nash being a credible source, it will remain useful in this topic.

**Nash, Steven E. "Aiding the Southern Mountain Republicans: The Freedmen's Bureau in Buncombe County." *North Carolina Historical Review* 83, no. 1 (January 2006): 1-30. Accessed September 3, 2017. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23522931>.**

This paper examines the Freedmen's Bureau and its role in Western North Carolina. It primarily looks into the episodes of racial violence that occur in the area throughout the post-Civil War years, and even mentions the Election riot. While the mention of the Election Riot is rather brief, it still gives a somewhat detailed account of it, and gives a good background for the political scene at the time. The Freedmen's Bureau played a major role in handling cases of violence against African Americans, and therefore its importance to this topic cannot be understated. Alongside this, the sources used for this paper will serve as a good basis for the vast expanse of Freedmen's Bureau records that exist.

**Nash, Steven E. *Reconstruction's Ragged Edge*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016.**

Steven Nash recently put out this book, focusing specifically on Western North Carolina during Reconstruction. Alongside being the most closely related to my overall topic and area, it is also the most up to date source available. Within this book, Nash chronicles the struggles and race issues that were rampant during Reconstruction. His sources are sound and informative while the breadth of the topics are larger than the other sources listed. In short, this book has served as my main reference for most aspects of this paper thus far, making it an invaluable source.

**Olson, Eric. "Race Relations in Asheville, North Carolina: Three Incidents, 1868-1906." In *Appalachian Experience: Proceedings of the 6<sup>th</sup> Annual Appalachian Studies Conference*, edited by Barry M. Buxton, Malinda L. Crutchfield, William E. Lightfoot, and Jacqueline P. Stewart, 153-165. Boone, NC: Appalachian Consortium Press, 1983.**

Olson was the first to write a modern scholarly perspective on the Asheville Riot, meaning that he has influenced all other historiography within the past thirty-five years. Within most bibliographies, the citations for the Asheville Riot point directly towards Olson's paper. This paper focuses on three aspects or events from post-Civil War Asheville, one being the election riot, the next being frequent lynchings, and the final being the racist and stereotype heavy way in which African Americans were represented within the newspapers of the area. This source gives most of the basic information that we know from the riot, and attempts to put it into a scene of larger racial tensions within Western North Carolina. Alongside this, it is one of a small handful of papers that are focused specifically on the Asheville Riot and do not simply use it as a reference.

**Parsons, Elaine Frantz. *Ku-Klux: The Birth of the Klan During Reconstruction*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.**

Parson's *Ku Klux* worked to update the ideas forwarded by Allen Trelease in his 1971 book *White Terror*. These two works together account for a large portion of scholarly focus on the Ku Klux Klan in Reconstruction. As this is the most comprehensive and recent scholarship on the Klan, it will serve as an invaluable piece of the narrative within my paper.

**Trelease, Allen W. *White Terror: The Ku Klux Klan Conspiracy and Southern Reconstruction*. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1995.**

*White Terror* was, for years, the only in depth look into the Klan in Reconstruction. It serves as a citation and source for an incredibly large amount of the secondary sources that I will be using for this thesis. Alongside being an invaluable secondary source, it also provides detailed accounts of multiple Klan events within North Carolina, linking up to many primary sources.